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Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays.
Tony Bennett.
London: Routledge, 2018.

Museums, Power, Knowledge is the ultimate testimony to the fertile development of Tony Bennett's academic career. Now Research Professor of Social and Cultural Theory at the Institute of Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, Bennett is recognized as one of the most influential authors in the field of museum studies. In this book, 11 essays are brought together from his 30 years of research on "museums, power, and knowledge," which are divided into three parts—"Civic Engines," "Machineries of Modernity," and "Assembling and Governing Cultures"—according roughly to the chronology of the institutions and the exhibitions studied within the text. Most of the collected essays follow the successive interests of the author, offering in a convenient way—340 pages with some illustrations and a useful bibliography—some of the most famous papers in the field, such as "The Exhibitionary Complex," an article that first appeared in 1988. The book analyzes changes in museums of art, science, and history over a long period of time from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Instead of a one-sided view of institutional success, Bennett suggests a more complex process in the social life of things: an acculturation of the museum by society as it develops a literacy of museums and exhibitions. The museum thus transpires to be a site of legal innovation and cultural creativity, of pride in community and nation, situated between social consumption, leisure, and, of course, politics.

A Philosophical History of Museums

The first part of the book, echoing the model imagined by Michel Foucault, explains how the museum illustrates the shift from the classical age, symbolized by the principle of sovereignty associated with the royal collections, to the liberal age, when the figure of the People is substituted for the figure of the Prince. At this time, the *flâneur* associated with the collections previously is transformed into a responsible citizen, who is governed by the gaze of his fellow

visitors, according to the *dispositif* of the new bourgeois civilization. This new discipline of display— the "exhibitionary complex"—requires a universality of access contrary to the limits once put on uses of the collections. Bennett deals with the cognitive and emotional attachments that develop through contact with museums—be they real and physical or through other media that extend the impact of the institution. Replication, authenticity, and commodity are intimately related in the fabrication and diffusion of the museum object by the institution. Thinking in this way about how museums negotiate their cultural authority opens up new directions of research in museums and material culture history, directions associated with the definition of the state, civil society, and public space.

The history of the last two centuries tells of the triumph of the museum. These foundations and metamorphoses of collections have taken entirely new legal, rhetorical, and iconographic forms, and at the same time they have incarnated the modern institution of culture. From this point of view, the boundaries between the private and the public, the process of the elaboration of the nation-state and its representation of the heritage of an "imagined community," have been at the heart of a complex process of adjustment as expressed in a multiplicity of ideological, political, social, and cultural debates. Bennett explains in the second part of the book how this "machinery" works—in things such as print, newspapers, postal systems, maps, and statistics. In the modern museum, objects are becoming (as he puts it, referencing Bruno Latour) "immutable mobiles." "Yet," Bennett writes, "such immutable mobiles become, so to speak, 'mutable immobiles': that is, in the case of museum objects, things which take on new properties and become the sites of varied relational effects while staying (broadly) in the same place" (9).

Such observations are crucial to understanding the process of becoming a museum object, of being part of multiple exhibitions and calculations. Bennett employs a close reading of Stephanie Moser's analysis of the Smirke Galleries at the British Museum to demonstrate the historical transformations of material in a disciplinary form—in this case, within the framework of Egyptology. More generally, throughout the disciplines of geology, natural history, archeology, and ethnology, and at times according to a Pestalozzian system of education, pedagogical objects in museums informed the "clean eyes" of the visitors (170). As "civic laboratories," museums elaborate strategies designed to make the objects more useful for the public—that is, to give their public some "object lessons" set out to promote the benefits of collections, one example of these lessons being Generic Learning Outcomes in the United Kingdom. Bennett is convinced that the visitor in the museum experiences what he calls a *slow modernity*, the Darwinian liberalism that implies "that natural law dictated that social progress could only be, and must therefore aspire to be, slow and cumulative" (150).

The last part of these essays refers to the performativity of the museum, particularly in colonial settings, with the notorious case of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. In a formulation theorizing museums through ideas of the field and the milieu, Bennett writes:

> It was through the connections that were thus established between field, museum and other components of the scientific–administrative assemblage of colonial humanism that the Musée de l'Homme connected with the inhabitants of France's colonial territories not as publics to be transformed by educative measures but as populations whose behaviour was to be changed by conscripting scientific expertise to the task of engineering the milieus in which they lived. (237)

The English Genealogy of a Global and Radical Critic

Over his long academic career, Bennett did not so much write monographs as articles that were later collected together in books: this fact can be related to the development of museum studies as a distinct field, or, more broadly, to the field of cultural studies itself. But most studies of heritage are devoted to case studies. Bennett, on the contrary, might be called an armchair museologist, one of those social scientists Pierre Bourdieu condemned some years ago as sociologists without surveys and historians without archives. One may argue that in fact this is correct due to Bennett's decision to embrace all kinds of museums—geology, history, and art—in an analysis of "the museum" as such. Nevertheless, Bennett is not a philosophical historian of the Hegelian sort. His work is always grounded in results and findings that he borrows largely from historians who examine science, institutions, or colonial issues, using archival material from published collections or using excerpts given in monographs. His first well-known book, *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), was a collection of articles with a subtitle (*History, Theory, Politics*) that seemed to define his fields of interest for the next 30 years to come. This trilogy was developed in different chapters—"History and Theory," "Politics and Policy," and "Technologies of Progress"—according to a sense of balance between abstractions that we recognize in all the titles of his books that followed: *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (1998); *Pasts beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (2004); and *Making Culture, Changing Society* (2013).

A majority of museum histories take the form of portraits dedicated to individual institutions constructed in national contexts, with the exception perhaps of studies of museum origins and early beginnings, which bear witness to the cosmopolitan nature of the Enlightenment. The commemoration of a particular museum tends to focus on its architecture or on the growth of its collections, or it provides a kind of dictionary of people and places involved with the institution. Thus museum history has been dominated by an approach dedicated either to the history of the collections or to the topography and organization of the display spaces. Museums have also provided the focal point for a history of disciplines, as these institutions were regularly described as the location of certain fields of study intimately related to material culture: this is particularly evident with the case of art history, which is intimately bound up with the emergence of the art museum. The analyses of nineteenth-century visual culture renewed these approaches, notably the analysis in the seminal work by Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (1978), dealing with the spectacles in the early-nineteenth-century capital, which included panoramas, waxworks, and human showcases.

After reading this encyclopedia of curiosities and urban spectacles, from "monster mongers and retailers of other strange sights" to collections of wax anatomies, Bennett was convinced that "the nineteenth-century was quite unprecedented in the social effort it devoted to the organization of spectacles arranged for increasingly large and undifferentiated publics" (29). Studying the sights of London depicted through guidebooks and travel literature during the nineteenth century, as London was becoming the world's capital of entertainment and knowledge, Bennett forged the concept of the "exhibitionary complex," which was defined as "first, the tendency for society itself—in its constituent parts and as a whole—to be rendered as a spectacle. . . second, the increasing involvement of the state in the provision of such spectacles," and finally the creation of "a context for the permanent display of power/knowledge" (30–31).

This model is inscribed in a very specific context: the relationship between fine art and the poor in late-nineteenth-century England. One of the authors Bennett quotes, Frances Borzello, has pointed out that "it seemed incredible that a nineteenth-century cleric could believe that paintings had the power to civilise his community of London's poorest. Yet that is what he did

believe and his ideas were exported round the world" (n.d., 2014). In fact, probably no other European country has been so involved in such social concerns about art and science museums. The discourse on the museum has strong political implications in Britain with the question of municipal investments and the professionalization of curators, and with the emergence of a collective interrogation concerning the economy of culture as related to political science. The French case, notably, is very different due to the universality allegedly given to the institution by the Revolution and its affirmation of the abstract principle of publicity. So at this point, one question would be about the possibly "parochial" quality of Bennett's analysis of the museum. Does he duly acknowledge the Englishness of his model of the institution and of its evolution, or does he take it for granted?

Caliban in the Museum World?

Bennett's criticism of the "new museology" of the 1980s reflects the structures of class in Britain, as it is linked to the commercial success of parks considered as representations of an Eden of the working class (at Beamish, for example). The same is true with his analysis of Blackpool's Pleasure Beach, which is very typical of a British history of leisure that has no equivalent on the continent. More generally, *The Birth of the Museum* borrowed largely from a strong academic tradition of urban studies in the United Kingdom: Bennett read the institution as part of a process of building a series of facilities or amenities devoted to the welfare of citizens in a typical framework of municipal socialism or of philanthropy. He wrote that "the development of museums, as mechanisms for the development of self-civilizing subjects, has to be considered in terms of their relations to such infrastructures: the development of public libraries, of national and transnational transport systems (railways and shipping lines), of gas and—later—electric lighting" (90). In fact, he used the metaphor of the civic engine or of modern machinery, much like the French philosopher of science Michel Serres (a model for Latour) did with reference to literature as well as to physics, in his analysis of nineteenth-century dreams and values. (see Brown 2002, and Serres and Latour 1995). Bennett is particularly clear about this in his comments on the world fairs and their various manifestations of the Darwinian science of evolution and of rationalization, when the progress of civilization was supposed to be displayed and communicated adequately.

So it seems to me that Bennett's work owes much to a British Marxist background. Even if Stuart Hall or Richard Hoggart are not exactly quoted in this collection of essays, it is not hard to recall memories of these two authors when reading Bennett's analysis of the cultural *praxis* of museums. His interest in the history and the sociology of Victorian museums is also linked to the themes of English urban history. But Bennett cannot be understood only as a by-product of urban history nor indeed as a purely English product. Like many continental leftist social scientists of his generation, he was also influenced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and his critique of cultural hegemony that appeared in some references in his first papers. In the 1970s and the 1980s, there was a crucial concern that museums were founded to achieve political and social objectives, to influence the moral and intellectual conduct of the citizen, and to provide declarations of national identity as assertions of certain views of history or culture. Museums were allegedly producing "master narratives" of liberal reform and urban government, and museum-going was interpreted as a civic ritual that naturalized the democratic nation-state. At this moment, Bennett largely read a lot of the so-called French theory, especially the poststructuralism of Michel Foucault, and the notion of cultural capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu. During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, his bibliography was astonishingly rich in French

books and articles, several of them not yet translated—something that was rather unusual among English-speaking social scientists.

Nevertheless, Bennett appeared in this context to be one of the more moderate members of the academic tribe, so his readers, even reluctantly, were more positive about his work than about many other books employing French theory. This is, for example, the explicit comment made by Randolph Starn (2005) in his survey of the "new" museum studies in seeking to find something useful in it for his fellow historians. Bennett used the Foucaultian model, but he also studied in the archives and read other monographs so that he fully recognized the materiality of the display, a thing that a lot of other cultural critics were not aware of. In addition, Bennett was not hostile to the progressive qualities of the institution, and he was, and is, well aware that the practices of the public in visiting museums must be read in their own way, and not just through the programs or the official incentives of the curators or directors of the institutions: the modern public museum therefore furnished in his view a form of visibility and of inspection by visitors that allows for the apparition of a self-regulating citizen.

The Museum as Tastemaker and Assemblage

Over the past two decades with the rise of material studies of consumption, anthropology, and the history of art, scholars have asked questions related to how objects mediate social relationships. Writing about the material world of identity is dominated today by heated debates on how the different actors and consumers of heritage use objects to elaborate their identities. Bennett's work analyzes these topics in the Australian context with precision, clarity, and candor. He quotes the statements of the Australian Department of Communications and the Arts in 1994 about the alleged role of art in forging the national identity of the country through the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, which "re-opened its Australian galleries to provide a comprehensive survey of Australian Art," while also being committed to "the collection and display of cultures of non-European societies, particularly those of Indigenous Australia and South-East Asia," thereby strengthening "the pluralistic nature of Australia's culture" (34). The attention accorded Aboriginal art here—recognized as "a strong and increasingly visible aspect of the visual arts sector" (33)—echoed the emphasis that the Creative Nation placed on the "culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" as heirs to the "magnificent heritage of the oldest civilization on earth" in providing "an essential element of Australian identity, a vital expression of who we all are" (40). Taking a critical stance on taste and cultural history, Bennett here wants to ask what it means for a national museum to "embrace wider Eurocentric art historical, curatorial and epistemological imperatives" (Lehnert 2018: 91).

The dialogue between cultural critics and curators has obviously changed a lot in the last generation, due to the real challenges raised by critical academics to the traditional way of collecting, curating exhibitions, and interpreting objects. The transformation is a lot more evident in the case of museums of anthropology because of the special relationship that this discipline is supposed to have with its objects. Do we need museums? That question, which anthropologists readily posed, was after all one that other museum specialists did not ask, especially in art history. So anthropology museums have been directly involved in the discussions that Bennett has opened or developed in recent years, which is a testimony to the way in which he has inflected museological debates with an anthropological dimension, and it is a reflection of the refocusing of Bennett's own interests onto postcolonial issues, a refocusing that was due in part to his shift to Australia. The fact that the last papers about Australian exhibitions are a lot more confident about the powers of the institution than the first ones about English industrial museums is

probably a result of this double move. But it is also perhaps the product of a move from a form of cultural Marxism to the "flat" theories of modernism espoused in recent social theory.

In his chapter in volume one of the *International Handbook of Museum Studies* (2015), Bennett uses the title "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage." This is a good summary of the transition between the Foucaultian approach of the 1970s and the "flat" worlds seen in the work of Latour. In *Material Powers* (Bennett and Joyce 2010), Bennett critiques, more radically than in his previous studies, the separation between material and spiritual, natural and social, and human and nonhuman, and especially the difference between society and state, and between society and economy or culture in the name of the idea of "assemblages," where diverse flux assembles and reassembles, forever meeting in new patterns. But a fidelity to Foucault is also obvious, as the author quotes a part of the lessons that Foucault gave in 1978 in Paris about politics and the state, when he refused to search for the secrets of the state by "undertaking an investigation of the problems of the state, on the basis of practices of governmentality" (2008: 77–78).

The interest in Latourian sociology in Bennett's work prefigured a general surge in references to actor–network theory (ANT) in Anglophone museum studies and related fields. To quote John Law, ANT is actually "a set of empirically grounded practices" and not a theory (2009: 141). The famous work by Michel Callon (1984) on the scallops of St. Brieuc Bay, for example, is a testimony to the descriptive, rather than explanatory, method that has brought about a focus on empirical case studies in the social sciences rather than on grand theory. The so-called material turn was also influential in this change: the proof here would be the last chapter in Bennett's book, a recent piece telling the fascinating story of a particular object, the Gweagal shield collected at Botany Bay and allegedly seen as a relic of James Cook's arrival in Australia. The episode (274–285) is linked to a precise analysis of the exhibition *Encounters* at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra (2015–2016), which gives Bennett the opportunity for an overview of the complex relationship of White Australia to its history and the legacy of Aboriginal peoples in a dialogue with Stephen Bann, the famous art historian, as well as with Neil MacGregor, the then director of the British Museum. The cultural model of the museum as a temple of universal art that led to the universal consciousness of "heritage" in the twenty-first century is then radically questioned—Bennett calls it "rattling the museum" (285)—by rethinking the great narratives of its objects through an attempt to write a history of political rationalities and of the technologies of knowledge. Settling in Australia seems to have unsettled Bennett's thinking, in a good way, and has made his writing more concrete, territorialized, and present—and this is surely for the best.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums, and Liberal Government.

Tony Bennett, Fiona Cameron, Nélia Dias, Ben Dibley, Rodney Harrison, Ira Jacknis, and Conal McCarthy. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

The recently published volume *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums, and Liberal Government* is the product of collaborations between an impressive group of seven internationally respected researchers and thinkers in the fields of museum studies, heritage studies, and anthropology. The volume itself is one of a number of outputs to have emerged from this collaboration, which commenced with the awarding of an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant entitled Museum, Field, Metropolis, Colony: Practices of Social Governance, which ran from 2011 to 2014. Positioned at the intersection of museums, anthropological fieldwork, and forms of authority, *Collecting, Ordering, Governing*, as the title suggests, explores practices of collecting, ordering, and governing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with particular attention placed on those settler-colonial contexts produced within Australia, New Zealand, Britain, France, and North America. Indeed, it is programs of colonial governance and associated logics developed across that time frame that are of especial interest to the authors: the aftermath of the colonial period of conquest; the cessation